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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current attitude of Congress and the administration toward federal support of education and suggests what steps educators can take to encourage the enactment of desirable legislation. The author argues that it is both appropriate and necessary for professional educators to involve themselves in the political progress, and he gives several recent examples of cases where educators have had a significant impact on the course of pending federal legislation. (JG)

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# WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH FEDERAL LEGISLATION*

William Simmons

The state of the nation in terms of federal support for educational programs may, if the recommendations of the present administration are followed, go from bad to worse. The budget requests presented to the Congress by the former congressman from the Fifth District in Michigan propose to solve the national budget problem and the problems of education by endorsing a startling $1.2 billion reduction in the support of federal education programs.

This unreal approach, first proposed during the declining days of the Johnson administration, vigorously pursued during the Nixon regime, and now a guiding principle of the present occupant of the White House during a crucial election year, will compound the fiscal dilemma that faces almost every school district in the nation.

The question before the educational community is "What should we do about it?" -- or, indeed, "Is there anything we can do to halt the decline in the share of the gross national product allocated to education?" My answer is that there is much we can do, and the record of the organized efforts of the educational sector since 1967 supports this position.

Digressing a bit, let me iterate and respond to some of the questions often asked by local school people of those working in Washington in support of more federal dollars for education:

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Do members of Congress seriously consider communications from their individual constituents?

A very recent example of the effectiveness of personal contacts with congressmen was last September's override of the President's veto of the FY 1976 Education Appropriation bill. Prior to the scheduled vote, representatives of school districts from almost every congressional district had written, telephoned, or visited their congressmen urging them to override the veto. During the debate on the floor, legislator after legislator detailed the numbers of personal contacts received from school people in support of their determination to override the veto. Even those legislators staunchly in favor of the President's position plaintively admitted they were besieged by letters and "buttonholed" in their offices to commit themselves to the override. These communications were effective -- the veto was overridden 379-41 in the House and 88-12 in the Senate -- and, of additional importance, set the stage for subsequent overwhelming rejections of the President's veto of the National School Lunch Act and the Labor-HEW Appropriations bill.

Is there any indication that the efforts of school people have become a significant factor in preventing a decrease in education appropriations?

Funding for federal education programs in recent years has followed a fairly similar pattern from insufficient budget

proposal to enactment of appropriation legislation which is less insufficient. The fiscal year 1976 budget request for education was $6.016 billion and the final enactment was $7.358. Compare these figures with the fiscal year 1970 budget request of $2.9 billion and an enactment of $4.2 billion. As previously pointed out, these have been years during which educational programs have not been smiled upon by the Administration. However, it has been during this period, also, that the educational community has applied concerted pressure on Congress for additional dollars through factual testimony presented before the Appropriations Committees and continued vigilance during the legislative process. It would surely appear that these efforts played a vital role in preventing the complete decimation of federal support for education.

Is education's share of the federal dollar large enough and important enough among total federal expenditures to receive much attention from Congress and to justify expending our energy to get it?

While the fiscal year 1976 budget request for educational programs represents slightly less than 2% of the total federal budget, that amount provides almost 8% of the total revenue for educational institutions. Although most educators agree that federal support for schools should be more nearly 30%, the present 8% is not an insignificant amount. Maintenance and improvement of this level of support can be accomplished only through

the efforts of concerned individuals -- efforts directed toward members of Congress, each of whom, although he may represent no defense installations, national parks, or industrial complexes, does have schools in his district.

In view of the capability of educational organizations in presenting the schools' case to Congress, isn't it better to leave that activity to those experts?

The concerted endeavors of organizations do have great influence on political issues, but they do not nor are they intended to replace the personal contacts of a congressman's constituents. These contacts can bring home most efficiently and effectively the impact on individual school districts of funds curtailment, permitting the congressman to determine the degree of need which should be met through the appropriation process.

Will increased federal support result in more red tape in connection with educational programs?

In all probability newly enacted federal programs would include reporting requirements. However, while such requirements are at the least an annoyance to those who must fulfill them they also serve to benefit the local school districts by informing them as to the financial status and educational effectiveness of the programs.

Will an increase in federal support for education erode local autonomy?

Educators and the general community have long looked askance at federal support for education as a threat

to local autonomy. The fact is that almost all legislation for such support mandates community involvement and has led to more participation in and awareness and control of the total school program by local school people and parents than ever before.

Is it professional for school administrators to involve themselves in political issues?

Members of legislative bodies are increasingly relying on school people for information which will help them exercise their best judgment regarding pending educational measures. Their opinions are sought and seriously considered. The influence of the education sector is reflected in the national insistence that adequate educational opportunity for all persons shall be legislatively provided. It would appear that the involvement of educators in the political process has greatly enhanced their professional standing.

The blessing of our system of government, once we understand the process, is that each and every one of us can make a difference if we understand the issues and respond to those who do have a vote with positive facts and hard information as it relates to the school districts of a given congressional district. Despite the present dismal outlook for more federal dollars for education, action by concerned people can improve the prospects.

The present system of allocating money in the federal budget combines education with manpower and social service functions and works to the detriment of funding for educational purposes. Education, being a "controllable" expenditure, i.e., appropriations

are determined annually, suffers at the hands of manpower and social services functions which include "uncontrollable" expenditures, or those for which the government is committed to meet matching state funds with federal money.

The result is, as demands for the previously-committed funds rise, available money under the spending ceiling set by the Budget Committee for education decreases. This situation could be alleviated by designating education as a separate budget function. Proposals to accomplish this merit the support of school people.

The President has requested that $6.9 billion be budgeted for educational programs for fiscal year 1977. Included in this amount is a $263 million carrot intended to make an expected administration-sponsored proposal for consolidation of programs more palatable to the education sector. To be introduced as the Financial Assistance for Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the consolidation measure would combine ESEA Title I, education of the handicapped, ESEA Title IV (the new consolidation of library resources and innovation) and vocational and adult education into a $3.3 billion block grant to states. The legislation will provide that three-fourths of the funds must be used for handicapped and disadvantaged children, with allocations to states based on formula, and will stipulate a three-fourths pass-through to local educational agencies. If Congress does not buy the Administration's proposal, the $263 million "incentive" money will be withdrawn.

While similar legislation was proposed by the President, but not introduced because of a lack of a sponsor, during the first session of the 94th Congress, those concerned with schools must

be alert to the fact that the climate of the second session could be such as to consider a measure which would permit the federal government to further abdicate responsibility for supporting education.

In exploring legislative measures which benefit schools, educators should not limit their thinking or support to programs which apply strictly to the classroom. Implications -- and sometimes money -- for education are contained in such provisions as revenue sharing, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, federal collective bargaining, unemployment compensation, workman's compensation, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Thoughtful analysis of proposed amendments to this kind of legislation and their effect on your school district will lead to a determination of your support or opposition to the measures. Let your congressman know your views of the issues.

The committee hearings, the committee report, the congressional calendar, the final action of the House or Senate, the conference report, the path a bill must travel, and all other facets of the process become understandable through direct involvement. Those engaged in the political process must know the whys and wherefores. This type of training system can be accomplished. It has been accomplished during the training sessions conducted during the appropriation battles of the past six sessions of Congress. Members of Congress generally respond more quickly to requests from those who care enough to understand the process that governs their requests.

The road to increased federal aid is political. If the joint effort is to be successful, all involved must understand the full ramifications of the political process.

An effective power base for the realization of those goals can only come through a mobilization of active, dedicated individuals. Schoolmen are needed in politics. Their united voices, widely recognized, will influence the politics of education. The basic goal of that political effort should be quality, equal education for all.